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REVIEWS AND ABSTRACTS OF LITERATURE

The Psychology of Conviction. JOSEPH JASTROW. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1918. Pp. xix + 387.

The war has been a continual lesson in the psychology of conviction. It showed us at the outset, in Germany, that unscrupulous manipulation of public opinion is a far greater menace to peace than any amount of purely material military preparedness. It proved later, in Russia and Germany, that autocrats fear propaganda more than they fear armies or assassins. It has revealed recently, in America, that what happens in Moscow or Petrograd is often determined, after the event, in the editorial sanctums of New York. It ought to have taught us, everywhere—if we have any philosophy and concern for the future—that political democracy is a delusion unless attended by intellectual democracy. Freedom to cast a vote is pure mockery if the voter's convictions are under some other man's control. Such freedom is only slavery under a new name.

In the *Psychology of Conviction*, then, Professor Jastrow has chosen a supreme theme. Because there is no more vital one in the world to-day, we expect big things of a book that treats it and have a right to judge it by exacting standards.

The plan and method of this volume are as admirable as its choice of subject. It follows the "case" system. In other words, after two chapters of more general introduction, "The Psychology of Conviction," and "Belief and Credulity," the author presents his material in the form of nine concrete illustrations or issues. Five of these ("The Will to Believe in the Supernatural," "The Case of Paladino," "The Antecedents of the Study of Character and Temperament," "Fact and Fable in Animal Psychology," and "'Malicious Animal Magnetism'") have to do predominantly with the "deviations" or "more irregular aspects" of the psychology of conviction. The remaining four ("The Democratic Suspicion of Education," "The Psychology of Indulgence," "The Feminine Mind," and "Militarism and Pacifism") discuss conviction in the making in controversial questions of the hour. On the whole, the emphasis of the volume is decidedly on the matter of personal as contrasted with social conviction and the problems suggested in the opening paragraph of this review are conspicuous by their absence, especially the question of journalistic control of public opinion with its political and economic ramifications. Perhaps Professor Jastrow is reserving all this for later treatment. If so we shall be less inclined to criticize him for practically omitting the dominant figure in his drama: the newspaper. This, however, is by the way. The

point we were making is that the concrete method of the book is precisely the right one: calculated to make the lay reader realize that psychology is not an abstract subject of concern only to high-brows and professors, but one of compelling human interest and importance for everybody.

The temper of the book is in keeping with its main contention: that as rapidly as possible we should substitute the method and spirit of scientific verification for the older and easier methods of believing what we always have believed, or what authority orders us to believe, or what happens to be agreeable to believe. Throughout (save perhaps for a faint trace of animus in the matter of *Psychical Research*), the author shows a scrupulous desire to view his subjects under all aspects, to weigh the evidence carefully, and to arrive at sane and balanced conclusions. This is especially true of his excellent treatment of militarism and pacifism.

The subject, the method, and the temper of the book, then, deserve nothing but praise. It is a pity that the same can not be said of its style. Not that its style is notably bad. As books on psychology go it is quite the opposite. But a volume like this, with an opportunity of wide appeal, ought to have a notably forcible and vivid style. *The Psychology of Conviction* ought to have a style as concrete as its own case method. It has a style that at times is exasperatingly abstract. Scientists do not seem to realize it, but this is a tremendously important matter. The success of democracy depends on the dissemination of knowledge, and knowledge will never be widely disseminated until the men who have it learn to write more nearly at the level of popular literary expression. If Professor Jastrow showed no power to do this, I should not have mentioned the matter. But he does. In two or three of his chapters, where his material includes much fact and anecdote, he shows it fairly continuously. Elsewhere he shows it more rarely. On few pages is it wholly lacking. He can strike off a telling metaphor, as when, speaking of the effect of confession, he writes, "The mental abscess has been lanced, and relief follows." He has command of irony: "The increasing number of college graduates may always be pointed to to prove the growing enlightenment of the state." He can pack wisdom and satire into two lines: "'Let thy knowledge be another's power,' is a proper text for a baccalaureate sermon that seeks democratic approval." He is capable of epigram: "The man of ideas is not gagged or muzzled, but tethered;" or (when he makes the pacifist reply succinctly to the taunt that his dreams are Utopian), "The alternative is between Utopia and Hell." The man who can write like this has a gift for expression. He has the less excuse,

therefore, for perpetrating such literary atrocities as, "Lord Morley thus protests against what he calls the House of Commons view of life, which subordinates principle to expediency,—which may be unfortunate, but necessary,—but in so doing sacrifices the paramount significance of principle,—which is both unnecessary and pernicious;" for putting plain thoughts with such squirming indirectness as, "Among issues characteristically modern, the controversy as to the true nature of woman and her place in the social order is peculiarly rich in complexity of argument and variability of conclusion;" or for diluting his style by piling up polysyllables (*controversy*, *controversies*, *controversial*, and *uncontroverted*, repeated ten times in the space of three pages is the first example that comes to hand). Literature ought to be *cream*. There is lots of cream in Professor Jastrow's book. But there is also much that is only milk. And there are many sentences suggestive of a still thinner liquid. If the volume were half as long, it would be four times as forcible.

Thought and expression are inseparable; and the harm done by the author's use of abstract language does not stop with the style; it seriously affects the philosophy of the book. This may be illustrated by the use of two words which are as nearly as any its keywords: *logic* and *science* (with their corresponding adjectives).

"The logical sense," says Professor Jastrow, "is the slowest, most laborious, as well as the most precious of psychological growths." "Wisdom is the name for the exercise of the logical function." "Thinking is an art, the art of logic." "Our approach to [the latter day issues] and our faith in them is in the main a logical one." And so on. Now for the purposes of a narrowly professional or technical discussion a man is free to define and use the word *logic* as he wishes. But when he addresses the public he is bound, I contend, to employ words not in accordance with arbitrary definition, but with a sense for their history, their association, and what I may call their present moral character. Professor Jastrow's use of *logic* makes us blink, and ask how many centuries the calendar has been turned back. To attempt, in the year 1918, to pass off *logic* as even a remote synonym for *wisdom*, or to call it the most precious of psychological growths, is on a par with trying to make the word Pharisee the complimentary term it was in Jesus's day, or attempting to impart to the term *pious* the flavor of genuine holiness that it had in church circles a hundred or more years ago. The thing simply can not be done. As well try to give vogue to the pictures of Cimabue. And when the author goes further and half equates *logic* and *science* as in the clause, "It is the prerogative of the scientific method that it enthrones the logical right," he does violence to long-

standing habits that have led us to associate *logic* with the deductive, *science* (in spite of its deductive element) with the inductive method, to think of the age of science as a revolt from the age of logic.

Listen, now, to two or three men with a nice feeling for the past history and the present sense of the word *logic*. "Logic," says Samuel Butler (equally great as psychologist and man of letters), "has no place save with that which can be defined in words. It has nothing to do, therefore, with those deeper questions that have got beyond words and consciousness. . . . In all cases of doubt, the promptings of a kindly disposition are more trustworthy than the conclusions of logic, and sense is better than science." "The poet," says Chesterton (I quote from memory), "tries to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who tries to get the heavens into his head; and it is the head that splits." "This very law which the logicians would impose upon us," says William James, "—if I may give the name of logicians to those who would rule out our willing nature . . .—is based on nothing but their own natural wish to exclude all elements for which they, in their professional quality of logicians, can find no use." These men have caught the very soul of the word *logic*. If Professor Jastrow had done so, he would not have tried to reinstate in our favor a term that is soaked in formalism and fairly reeks with the odor of scholasticism.

The weakness in the author's use of *science* and *scientific* is of a very different character. Professor Jastrow comes close to apotheosizing science (you wonder he doesn't capitalize it). It is the "sovereign method" and "now that science has entered into her kingdom and the vastness of her domain is willingly recognized . . . the busy problem is the infusion of the scientific method into all our ways of thinking, its application to all the various kinds of beliefs that affect our ideals, our working conceptions, and our actions." And even in those departments of life that are "not ready" for its "exact application," its spirit, we are told, should prevail. Now no one denies that it would be well if the scientist's love of truth could pervade all our life. But why, to the confusion of language and thinking, call this love science? As well call the sun scientific because it gives light; or the moon because it is clear; or a child because it blurts out the truth. What this stretching of the word science to cover all creation is bound to end in has been foreseen and stated by Samuel Butler. "Science," says Butler, "is being daily more and more personified and anthropomorphized into a god. By and by they will say that science took our nature upon him, and sent down his only begotten son, Charles Darwin, or Huxley, into the world so that those who believe in him, *etc.*; and they will burn people for

saying that science, after all, is only an expression for our ignorance of our own ignorance." Butler, himself a great psychologist and biologist, saw the limits of science. One price of not seeing them we have observed on the battlefields of Europe.

This loose use of the word *scientific* follows Professor Jastrow, and, unless I am mistaken, betrays him in his innermost philosophy. It accounts for his failure to distinguish between two vitally different kinds and realms of conviction; it leads him to put his various "cases"—except for the incidental reason that some are settled and some still in the process of being settled—all on one level. Yet the distinction he fails to make is the most important one in the whole world of conviction. Let me illustrate:

Whether the earth goes round the sun or the sun round the earth, depends not one iota on human wishes. But whether democracy is the best form of government for mankind, depends absolutely on human wishes (if you wish to make Prussians, for example, democracy, decidedly, is not the thing). Whether Eusapia Paladino (to come to Professor Jastrow's own case) tipped tables miraculously during her séances in New York, is in no way affected by what we should like to think in the matter. But whether "the feminine mind" should dedicate itself to babies, or politics, or, for that matter, to table-tipping, is a question, fundamentally, of nothing except what we should like. Science may indeed show us what a baby-tending feminine mind will be; or a politically acting feminine mind; or a table-tipping feminine mind. But when it comes to which of the three is most desirable, science has not a word to offer. That is a question for religion, for philosophy, for art—or whatever other name you may give those human activities that have to do with the ends of life. Science (unless we stretch the word in the very way I am condemning) has to do only with the means.

It is the failure to make this distinction that leads Professor Jastrow to say in a passage that is the very heart and thesis of his book: "Viewed retrospectively, the greatest triumph of the human mind was the gradual removal of large areas of belief from the influence of the personal psychology of conviction. Scientifically established truth came to proceed objectively, undisturbed by interest in the outcome of inquiry and determined by the sanction of verification. The gradual disestablishment of the anthropocentric view of the universe culminated in the removal of human desire from its place of dominion in the formation of belief." Though the point is incidental, it is worth noting in passing that the phrase "undisturbed by interest in the outcome of inquiry" is false to the history of science. "If you want an absolute duffer in an investigation," says

William James, "you must, after all, take the man who has no interest whatever in its results: he is the warranted incapable, the positive fool." Perhaps what Professor Jastrow meant was not "undisturbed by interest in the outcome" but "undeterred by the nature of the outcome." That would have been true. And with this important qualification of the phrase "human desire" the whole passage becomes true—of *scientific* belief. But it is anything but true of other kinds of beliefs. The truth there is just the other way around. "Viewed retrospectively," we might say of *religious*, *philosophical*, or *political* belief, "the greatest triumph of the human mind has been the gradual enthronement of human desire in its place of dominion in the formation of belief." In the old days men used to believe that the world, physical and human, was what it was, or what the gods decreed, independent of human desire. Men still believe that of the physical world; but it is the precise mark of the modern man (I refer to no creed, school, or philosophy) that he believes the human world is what men make it; that it is what it is in virtue of human desire—or lack of that desire. It is the glory of science—whenever her limits have been understood—that she has contributed to that conviction. Without her power to serve human desires, she could not, for all the vain babble about truth for truth's sake, survive for a single day.

There are other abstract words unwisely used in this volume besides *logic* and *science*. I can mention only one other case. The phrase, "the will to believe," occurs and reoccurs on these pages, but never, so far as I have noted, in James's sense of "the *will* to believe," the power to *create* by faith, but always rather in the sense of the *inclination* to believe, the tendency to drop into the easy or agreeable belief: an attitude that James, like all virile men, abhorred. Professor Jastrow abhors it too. Why, then, for giving expression to his dislike, he should have chosen to debase James's phrase in a volume that bears James's name on the dedicatory page it is hard to understand.

To sum things up: the capital weakness of this volume is the lack of a fine sense of fitness in the use of abstract words and phrases¹—

¹ The most striking example of this in the volume is perhaps the following: "The mind as the logical instrument depends upon *supporting qualities*. These supporting qualities lie partly in the same field as the logical operations; such are keenness of perception, capacity for detail, sustained attention, ready imagination, range of association, a sense of pertinence, value, propriety, effectiveness. Quite as largely they are in the field of feeling and will, or encroach upon them; such are conscience, persistence, endurance, self-control, and that composite attitude that makes the professional temper." What can be made out of a passage that makes "sustained attention" (which of course is simply will) akin to the logical operations, while "persistence" is akin to feeling and

with the attendant confusion of thought that inevitably results. The reader is at times at a loss to know whether this confusion is in the author's mind or in the unintended implications of his language. Even if it is only the latter, it might just as well, so far as the reader is concerned, be the former.

The emphasis I have placed on this one matter has involved the risk, I realize, of doing grave injustice, through lack of proportion, to the many merits of *The Psychology of Conviction*. I owe the author an apology perhaps for having not so much reviewed his work in the conventional sense as having made it a peg on which to hang an essay on a single aspect of it. Here Professor Jastrow makes an honest and largely successful attempt to popularize psychology, and here comes the reviewer jumping into him for not being even more successful. It is very ungrateful. Well; all I can say is that when you see the right thing being done you want to see it done up to the hilt. That must be the excuse for my procedure, that and what I believe to be the critical importance of the point I have stressed.

Plato taught us that political happiness will never be attained until the rulers of men are philosophers. Democracy means that the people are to rule. Therefore the people must become philosophers. One of the first and most indispensable steps in this direction is that the present leaders of thought should think like philosophers but write like ordinary men. For as that astonishing genius William Blake once remarked: "Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believed," a sentence that would make a good motto for a democratic university and comes close to putting in a nutshell the whole psychology of conviction.

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JOURNALS AND NEW BOOKS

PSYCHOLOGICAL BULLETIN: April, 1918. *An Experiment with an Automatic Mnemonic System* (pp. 99-103): D. S. HILL.—A classroom experiment with an automatic mnemonic is explained. *General Reviews and Summaries: Affective Phenomena—Descriptive and Theoretical* (pp. 104-108): H. N. GARDINER.—Seven references are reviewed. *Attention and Interest* (pp. 108-111): W. B. PILLSBURY.—Ten references are reviewed. *Time and*

will? To say nothing of other inconsistencies and strange collocations! The passage is a good example of the tendency to make *logical* mean so much that it means nothing.